Partnership for Sustainable Communities Brownfields Pilots – Lessons Learned Fact Sheet for Local and State Stakeholders

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) are working together under the Partnership for Sustainable Communities (PSC) to ensure that federal investments, policies, and actions support development that is more efficient and sustainable. In February 2010, the Partnership selected five Brownfields pilots—in Boston, Massachusetts; Denver, Colorado; Indianapolis, Indiana; Iowa City, Iowa; and National City, California—to receive direct technical assistance from EPA.

The goals for these projects were to:

- Quickly develop and build upon existing working relationships between HUD, DOT, EPA, and local stakeholders;
- Identify barriers and opportunities for programmatic and policy changes across the three agencies;
- Maximize the impact of available federal resources on transit, housing, and brownfields;
- Ensure the equitable redevelopment of brownfields near transit; and
- Gather lessons for implementing area-wide planning approaches.

This fact sheet describes overarching principles for developing successful PSC projects. It also presents lessons learned related to fostering meaningful participation, building partnerships, scoping and project planning, and implementing revitalization plans. The lessons learned were identified by pilot stakeholders representing the local, state, regional, and federal levels, as well as the government, community based, nonprofit, and private sectors.

Overarching Principles

- **Be flexible.** As projects move forward, project scopes can change as new information is discovered or priorities change. A comprehensive communication strategy can help project partners adjust. This can allow the project to improve its course and add more value.
- **Set realistic expectations.** Establish scopes of work and communication mechanisms with stakeholders that reflect the goals and expected outcomes of the project.
- **Think green from the beginning.** There is a strong interest in the areas of green building, green infrastructure, urban agriculture, fresh food access, local economic development, local contracting, multimodal transportation options, and equitable transit oriented development (TOD).
- **Address Displacement.** Consider that displacement and gentrification issues are serious local concerns; revitalization planning must seek to preserve existing neighborhoods as much as possible, while adding density and services in a context-sensitive way.
- **Define clear goals and metrics of success.** Many of the definitions of sustainable neighborhood development are high level (e.g., walkable, livable) and require consideration of complicated and typically divided systems (e.g., water management, energy management, transportation, or housing). It can be helpful to define sustainability for the local community, create a set of metrics to guide and measure project outcomes, or use an established checklist to guide project decisions (e.g., Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design-Neighborhood Development (LEED-ND), elements of Green Communities, or the Sustainable Sites Criteria). In addition, it can be helpful to identify or develop metrics that evaluate success on behalf of multiple agencies or groups. Further, linking specific funding opportunities to the achievement of this definition can focus the work of project teams.
- **Understand market conditions.** Doing so informs the feasibility of the work being conducted, which itself helps identify priority activities and areas for focus. Discussions with the private market players needed for project implementation are critical.
- **Recognize that innovative solutions may require research and testing.** Pilot programs through local and state agencies enable projects to test/implement new strategies (e.g., low impact development strategies) and technologies that would not otherwise have been approved given current policies/regulations. This allows new strategies to be tested without an overall change

Successful projects rely on strong partnerships that include local, state, and federal government. Here, local representatives from several departments within the City of the Iowa City are working with EPA, the Metropolitan Planning Organization, and consultants to discuss and plan the Iowa City pilot

to city guidelines. The downside to the pilot approach is that these strategies/technologies may not be implemented city-wide through policy changes.

- **Incentives could push sustainability and connectivity further.** Specific sustainability performance achievements (whether through height or density bonuses, design assistance funding, etc.) that target walkability, bikeability, and/or connectivity encourage more projects to target these goals in future development.
- **Create durable processes.** Success is maximized and longer lived when the projects provide replicable models of decision making that can be applied to other geographies or issues.
- **Visions can drive investment.** Successful assessment, remediation and redevelopment of contaminated properties are maximized when the neighborhoods or districts in which they reside have community-based, neighborhood, or master plans that articulate a formally adopted vision for future uses.
- **Plan for implementation.** Efforts that include a detailed implementation plan demonstrate a higher level of organization and local capacity, which can make it easier to acquire project funding. Implementation plan elements may include: a timeline and plan for property acquisition, cleanup, reuse planning, site improvements, and development; an infrastructure improvement plan; and an overall funding strategy and partner commitments.

Fostering Meaningful Participation

- **Include all project stakeholders in the planning process.** When planning for community meetings to inform and get input about projects, it is critical that all project stakeholders are involved (i.e., contractors, the city, local non-governmental organizations (NGO), developers, and community residents). Being inclusive from the start provides an opportunity for stakeholders to voice support or dissent, suggest new ideas, and more robustly inform the planning process. Although it can slow project timelines, an inclusive, open public process can dramatically enhance the quality of revitalization planning, ensuring it meets the needs of residents.
- **Commit to expanding "the table" early in the project.** At some visceral level, people understand the benefits of expanding the project table to accommodate participation from diverse stakeholders. However, people with authority over the planning process do not always recognize that this can actually yield project outcomes with better design elements, improved durability, and the ability to more equitably meet community needs. From the outset, the planning process should commit to including these voices to ensure it does not inadvertently limit meaningful participation. Doing so can coalesce support for revitalization goals and leverage funding and other resource commitments.
- **Pursue outcomes that serve the diversity of the community.** Projects should prioritize the participation of a variety of stakeholders to fully represent the community's diversity, and project outcomes should be directly linked to the needs and preferences of local stakeholders. Taking steps to incorporate diverse stakeholder input into the planning process and project goals promotes more equitable outcomes.
- **Commit to reach communities where they are.** Do not presume that you can create sufficient incentives to bring people to your meetings. It takes time to think creatively about how to engage people effectively and developing an engagement plan that meets people where they are. It is not the most efficient path initially, but may pay off later through increased community

support for the project. Public sector investment in planning and public participation can support developers that do not have the resources to do this type of pre-development work.

- **Build lasting representative organizational capacity.** Revitalization projects, such as the PSC Brownfields pilots, take months or years to complete. The expectation that a project will engage and sustain resident participation for months and years is unreasonable. Projects can be guided by governing structures (e.g., working groups, advisory committees) that are reflective of the community affected by the project. Having organizations that are credible and represent perspectives of marginalized residents participate in a governing body can foster long-term organizational capacity.

Building Partnerships

- **Cross-jurisdictional partnerships can enhance project success.** State and local agencies, private stakeholders, and community organizations often have common, long-term interests but competing short-term priorities that can limit coordination among these groups. By purposefully establishing new cross-jurisdictional partnerships (e.g., partnerships between local, state, and federal governments, or between community development groups), project stakeholders can benefit from working together rather than competing against one another to achieve long-term transportation, land use, housing, or environmental goals.
- **Think long term.** Just as every revitalization project is different, the best partnership to advance a project and lead to better outcomes will vary from project to project. However, partnerships that maintain momentum through regular and effective collaboration are generally more effective than those that dissipate after a short time. Regular collaboration may be facilitated through formal approaches including Intergovernmental Agreements, mandates from elected leadership, formal advisory committees, and financial or in-kind staff contributions from partners (where ongoing participation is a function of their financial management responsibilities). Less formally, partnerships can be maintained by a partnership leader or through the development of a collaboration plan.
- **Build bridges early.** Where a non-governmental entity is the project lead, it is critical to coordinate this effort with city goals and stakeholders at the beginning of the project to avoid conflict and build mutual capacity. This can be a critical step in maximizing success for the project and in building and protecting long-term partnership potential.

Scoping and Project Planning

- **Understand project needs to ensure success.** Early and thorough investigation of project needs through regular meetings, conference calls, and email communication is critical for successful implementation. This is crucial in creating reliable timelines, tasks and budgets.
- **Use multiple communication tools for consistency.** Managing multiple, related sub-projects requires enhanced communication—including numerous conference calls, consistent email (individual and group), and Web-based training—in order to balance federal, state, and local priorities.
- **Open the project with an open dialogue.** Holding a kickoff meeting for general and project introductions provides a forum in which all stakeholders can communicate their priorities and available resources; it also will assist in understanding project needs and maximize chances for successful implementation.
- **Identify resources and capacity.** Figure out what each state and local agency can bring to the table and how those resources can make the most out of strategic linkages. Sometimes it takes working on projects over time to identify these synergies.
- **Account for policy limitations.** Identify applicable local plans, requirements or policies (e.g., land use, stormwater, housing). City policies may limit the implementation and effectiveness of strategies. Evaluate existing land use codes, policies, etc. to evaluate whether or not they pose obstacles. Identify how these policies can be changed if needed (state legislation, local code amendment, site by site variances, etc.).

Developing graphical renderings, such as this area-wide concept plan, can make plans more realistic for project stakeholders, generating momentum for revitalization

- **Account for cross cutting issues.** Look beyond project boundaries to ensure a comprehensive approach and solution. For example, stormwater does not follow property lines. A regional basin or watershed approach to stormwater issues (e.g., flooding, water quality) may allow for a more comprehensive and appropriate solution.
- **Language matters.** Use terminology consistent with that of potential revenue streams (public and philanthropic grants) to help maximize the future financial support for implementation. Those groups could/should be part of the dialogue at project inception through completion.
- **Think regionally.** Consider the regional impact and demand for the local project. For example, improving pedestrian and bicycle connectivity within the neighborhood could limit automobile movement through the neighborhood; and custom bike racks may incur additional costs for maintenance and repair. Projects should identify and consider city and regional plans, processes, and requirements when evaluating goals and strategies.

Implementing Revitalization Plans

- **Existing plans can maximize investment.** Applying state and local assistance to projects that have already developed a Master Plan and/or Neighborhood Plan can help a community to further refine a project's design and maximize implementation feasibility.
- **Base decisions on reliable information.** Data, fact-based evidence, and scientific analysis can inform the planning effort and garner project support. In some situations, introducing data to demonstrate the benefit of approaches (e.g., return on investment for selecting greener technologies) can provide clarity and understanding critical to gaining stakeholder support for a project's sustainability elements. In addition, data can be used to provide the foundation for more in-depth and substantive stakeholder discussions to advance understanding beyond a conceptual level or to help resolve disputes.
- **Present technical information clearly.** Presenting technical information when the audience is both technical and non-technical can be challenging, but is often necessary. In public forums, breakout groups can be used to organize an audience into different skill sets, where some may focus on technical or design issues while others address policy or implementation.
- **Use graphics to convey technical concepts.** Translating conceptual plans into easily understandable visual graphics (e.g., 3-D images and water color sketches that show envisioned density levels, general building types, and greenspace) helps increase buy-in and understanding and demonstrates potential impacts to community members.
- **Capitalize on local information sharing resources.** There should be a knowledge management resource/database at the state or local level that can provide lessons learned, precedents, case studies, and funding resources utilized by similar projects. Suggested media includes interactive websites, videos, etc.